

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

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C O N F I D E N T I A L ADDIS ABABA 11934

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ELAB PINS ET

SUBJECT: TRADE UNION SITUATION

REF: ADDIS ABABA 11774 AND 11756.

SUMMARY: CONFRONTATION BETWEEN PMAC AND CONFEDERATION OF ETHIOPIAN
LABOR UNIONS (CELU) BEGAN WITH DIRG'S DISAPPROVAL OF CELU'S RESOLUTION

AND DECLARATION THAT IT WAS ILLEGAL AND SEDITIOUS. APPARENT END HAS
COME IN ATMOSPHERE OF REPRESSION, WITH ARRESTS OF MOST, IF NOT ALL,
OF THE APPROXIMATELY 175 SIGNATORIES OF RESOLUTION AND WITH DIRG
COMMITTEES VISITING WORKPLACES OF THOSE WHO PARTICIPATED IN "STAY AT
HOME" DEMONSTRATION AND GIVING STERN LECTURES AND WARNINGS. SUCH
VISITS HAVE ALSO OCCASIONED BEATINGS AND SHOOTINGS. CELU HEADQUARTERS
IS IN COMPLETE DISARRAY AND ITS LEADERS IN HIDING OR DETENTION. IN
THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, IMMEDIATE FUTURE OF ORGANIZED LABOR IS ENTIRELY
DEPENDENT ON MILITARY: AND IF, AS AND WHEN DIRG DECIDES TO ANNOUNCE
NEW LABOR POLICY, THE TRADE UNION SETUP IS EXPECTED TO BE TIGHTLY
CONTROLLED. END SUMMARY.

1. KEY TO UNDERSTANDING LABOR'S SIDE OF RECENT EVENTS IS RECOGNI-
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TION THAT CALL FOR CELU'S GENERAL ASSEMBLY (SEPT. 20-24) WAS

PREMATURE. DATE HAD BEEN SELECTED SO THAT PROVISIONAL WORKERS' COMMITTEE (PWC) OF CELU WOULD BE REASONABLY CLOSE TO THREE MONTHS MANDATE IT HAD RECEIVED IN EARLY JUNE. PURPOSES OF ASSEMBLY WERE TO DRAW UP NEW CONSTITUTION, TO CONDUCT FRESH ELECTIONS AND TO ESTABLISH NEW POLICIES FOR FUTURE, ALL OF WHICH WERE PREDICATED ON ASSUMPTION DIRG WOULD HAVE PREVIOUSLY PROMULGATED NEW LABOR LAWS AND ESTABLISHED GUIDELINES. GENERAL ASSEMBLY WAS WELL ATTENDED, INDICATING PWC HAD DONE ITS WORK WELL IN REESTABLISHING LINKS BETWEEN AFFILIATED UNIONS AND NATIONAL CENTER. HOWEVER, NECESSARY PREREQUISITES FOR ACCOMPLISHMENT OF PURPOSES OF MEETING HAD NOT BEEN ESTABLISHED.

2. GENERAL ASSEMBLY FROM OUTSET HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO POSTPONE DRAFTING OF CONSTITUTION AND HOLDING OF ELECTIONS IN ACCORDANCE WITH SUCH NEW CONSTITUTION. THEY PROCEEDED, THEREFORE, TO DISCUSS POLICIES IN LIVELY AND RAMBLING DEBATE, FROM WHICH CAME OMNIBUS RESOLUTION CONTAINING ALL VIEWS EXPRESSED, INCLUDING MANY THAT WERE CONTRADICTORY, PETTY AND OBVIOUSLY UNACCEPTABLE TO DIRG. PWC LEADERS FOOLISHLY MADE FORMAL DELIVERY OF RESOLUTION TO DIRG ON AFTERNOON OF SEPTEMBER 24. THIS OVER-CONFIDENCE ON PART OF PWC THAT THEY COULD FLAUNT SUCH VIEWS IN FACE OF DIRG PROBABLY DERIVED FROM FACT THAT AT LEAST TWO DIRG OBSERVERS PRESENT DURING GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND NOTHING HAD BEEN SAID BY THEM OR HAD BEEN HEARD FROM DIRG.

3. SUBSEQUENT EVENTS AND DISCUSSION OF MOTIVES HAVE BEEN REPORTED IN REFTELS. IN ADDITION, THERE IS SUBSTANTIAL BODY OF OPINION, EMANATING FROM CERTAIN EMPLOYER GROUPS, EAL WORKERS, FORMER CELU OFFICIALS AND INTERESTED OBSERVERS, THAT DIRG INTENTIONALLY WITHHELD ITS REACTION TO AND SUPPRESSION OF RESOLUTION UNTIL AFTER GENERAL ASSEMBLY ATTENDEES HAD DISPERSED. ACCORDING TO THIS VIEW, EAL INCIDENT SHOULD BE INTERPRETED AS DELIBERATE DEMONSTRATION BY DIRG THAT CELU HAD GONE TOO FAR AND AS WARNING TO TEACHERS, STUDENTS AND OTHER GROUPS SHOWING INCREASING CRITICISM OF DIRG. BE THIS AS IT MAY, SUBSEQUENT DRIFT TOWARD GENERAL STRIKE SITUATION WAS BADLY HANDLED BY PWC LEADERSHIP.

4. CELU FOUND ITSELF CAUGHT IN THE POLEMICS OF ITS OWN GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION, ESPECIALLY THE FINAL CLAUSE WHICH CONTAINED ULTIMATUM THAT GENERAL STRIKE WOULD BE CALLED IF ANY MEASURE TAKEN

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AGAINST CELU OR ITS MEMBERS AS RESULT OF RESOLUTION ADOPTED. IN WAKE OF EAL INCIDENT, STRIKE CALL WAS ASSUMED BY SOME, BUT OTHERS AWAITED NOTIFICATION. HESITATION, CONFUSION AND LACK OF COMMUNICATIONS DOOMED ACTION FROM START. IF IT CAN BE SAID TO HAVE BEEN ORGANIZED AT ALL, STRIKE WAS POORLY ORGANIZED; AND CENTRAL LEADERSHIP WAS LACKING. BY END OF FIRST DAY AND HALF, SNOWBALLING EFFECT HAD RUN ITS COURSE, AND STILL NO MORE THAN 8,000 TO 10,000 WORKERS WERE PARTICIPATING. STRIKE NEVER BECAME GENERAL; AND

WEAKNESS OF ACTION WERE APPARENT TO ALL. DIRG'S CALL TO RETURN TO WORK, BACKED BY ARMS AND THE DECLARATION OF A STATE OF EMERGENCY, COULD BE ANSWERED ONLY BE COMPLIANCE. CELU/PWC NEVER DID ISSUE CALL FOR RETURN TO WORK; PERHAPS BECAUSE THERE WAS NO ONE LEFT WITH AUTHORITY TO ACT.

5. CELU HEADQUARTERS AT THIS STAGE IS VIRTUALLY EMPTY WITH ONLY FEW MINOR STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT. WHEREABOUTS OF PWC LEADERS AND MORE IMPORTANT STAFFERS IS UNKNOWN, BUT THEY ARE THOUGHT TO BE EITHER IN HIDING OR IN DETENTION. IT IS GENERALLY ASSUMED THAT SEVERE PUNISHMENT WILL BE METED OUT TO THEM. DIRG IS SENDING ARMED CONTINGENTS TO CELU AFFILIATES WHICH PARTICIPATED IN STRIKE. EMPLOYERS REQUIRED TO PROVIDE LIST OF WHO WORKED AND WHO DID NOT AND WHY. WORKERS CONSIDERED KEY INSTIGATORS HAVE BEEN ARRESTED, BEATEN AND REPORTEDLY ON OCCASION SHOT. PROCESS IS STILL UNDERWAY.

6. SPECULATION IS RIFE THAT DIRG WILL NOT ALLOW RE-FORMATION OF CELU ALONG PREVIOUS ORGANIZATIONAL LINES, BUT RATHER THAN CLOSE TRADE UNION CENTER DIRG IS EXPECTED TO APPOINT PUBLIC ADMINISTRATOR TO DIRECT ITS AFFAIRS AND KEEP IT UNDER FIRM CONTROL. DESPITE COWED ATTITUDE PREVAILING AMONG THOSE WHO PARTICIPATED IN STRIKE AND FEAR AMONG OTHERS, DIRG IS RUMORED STILL TO REGARD CELU AS POTENTIAL FUTURE RALLYING POINT FOR OPPOSITION. IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES WHAT WAS LEFT OF ETHIOPIAN FREE TRADE UNIONISM MAY NOW BE NUMBERED AMONG THE UNBURIED DEAD.

7. PLEASE INFORM AALC FOREGOING.
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